



Oxon
Woodturners

Art at Christmas

A personal account of my first Christmas fair as a seller



Have you ever sold a turning? My first sale was just a few days ago – the pictured red and blue spinning top for £8... Ka-ching! This happened last weekend, when club members John, Anita and myself shared two tables at the “Art at Christmas” craft fair held in Summertown, Oxford.

We signed up in January when Philippa Norris, the fair’s organiser, reached out seeking woodturners. To me at least, the next Christmas seemed like aeons away and it was an easy commitment to make. When October came around, however, I had nothing. Eek.

I spent the the next couple of months in a woodturning frenzy. (My wife claims that I didn't clean the loo once during this period). It wasn't all smooth going but I somehow ended up with a respectable number of “mushroom earring stands”, spinning tops, and pens. And a small forest of Christmas trees (below), following an ingeniously simple design taught to me by professional woodturner John Boyne-Aitkin, a.k.a. “The Bowler Hatted Turner”. With practice I was making them within five minutes a tree, a prowess I proudly demonstrated at the club’s November hands-on evening. Anticipation was rising.



The fair comprised some 15-20 tables of crafts, all run by the makers, and there was plenty to admire. My stand was between John and Anita in the middle of the hall, a



woodturning stronghold. We laid out a stack of “Oxon Woodturners” flyers to give to unsuspecting passers-by. Want to join a friendly club? (Said the flyer). There was live music, home-made cake brought by other stall-holders, and a buzz in the air. Let it begin...

by, I would get one spinning. People enjoyed trying them out, which often led to a sale. Overall, it was a bit disappointing that nothing else sold. Footfall was low and no-one seemed to be selling much. Maybe it would pick up on Sunday? In a panic I made five more tops that evening (pictured below). I began to develop theories of which wood spins best. Beech is the front-runner, but I was out of it and had to make do with Ash.

On the first day I sold all my spinning tops, but little else. The tops were an effective lure: whenever I noticed potential customers passing



Sunday was a bit better for me, I sold a couple of earring stands, a few pens, numerous Christmas trees and three of the five tops. A visit from old friends was very welcome. The fair was again pretty quiet, however, which was a shame given the high quality of goods on offer. It seems likely that we suffered the competition of many other events taking place over the same weekend.



Overall I very much enjoyed the weekend. I had many interesting and unexpected conversations, with the other stall-holders as well as shoppers. Two spinning top buyers told me about a scene in the Sci-Fi movie “Inception” featuring a top. I am a Sci-Fi fan and I will definitely seek it out.

Preparing for the fair consumed a *lot* of time (albeit at the lathe, which is no hardship), for only quite a modest *financial* reward. However, I found selling my own creations to be rewarding of itself. To see the items being taken away for others enjoyment is a strange thrill. It also did my woodturning confidence a power of good. The overall experience is one I would recommend to any budding turner who has the time and opportunity. I’m already thinking about next year...

I would like to thank the organisers for their hard work in making it happen, and for giving us the opportunity to join in.

Ace